

LAUGHTER AND THE SENSE OF HUMOR—By Edmund Bergler, M.D. Intercontinental Medical Book Corp. in cooperation with Grune & Stratton, Inc., New York. 297 pages, \$5.00.

Many years ago James Thurber composed an essay on the importance of "Leaving Your Mind Alone." The author of this book is a psychoanalytic psychiatrist who believes not only in not leaving the mind alone, but in not even leaving laughter alone. He courageously and, at great length, analyzes the subject of laughter, wit and humor.

As examples of the author's style and method, we may quote a few paragraphs:

"The nine 'esthetic dead-end' theories of laughter came from the German esthetic school of the nineteenth century. With the exception of one of their number, Theodor Lipps, none of them contributed anything of value. (Max Eastman has collected these theories with a diligence worthy of a better cause.) They all take as their point of departure the deductions of Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825) as published in *Die Vorlesung der Aesthetik* in 1804 under the pseudonym 'Jean Paul.' Humor, to Richter, represents not only art but ethics, and a philosophy of life. We laugh at the petty and inimical, he declares, contrasting it with the ideal of infinite sublimity. All things being petty, the tendency of laughter is to promote sympathy for mankind. When we laugh at other people's stupidity, we are lending them our own insight."

Interestingly enough, Richter assumes the existence of some kind of autonomy in jest: "The jest has no purpose other than its own being—the poetic bloom of its nettle does not sting, and one can scarcely feel the blow of its flowering switch full of leaves." He therefore opposes Hobbes' theory. Richter's own definition of humor as the fruit of a comparison between the petty and the sublime has a more realistic appendix, dealing with wit, "the disguised priest who marries all couples."

In discussing laughter in the adult sense, the author believes that wit is one of the techniques used by the ego to attack the superego. "This statement was later indirectly taken by L. Eidelberg ('A Contribution to the Study of Wit,' the Psychoan. Review, 32, 1; 1945), to subsume a scopophilic sideshow. Also utilizing the voyeuristic-exhibitionistic exchange mechanism (according to which both parts of scopophilia can be used as defense) as postulated by Eidelberg and myself in our joint study on depersonalization ('The Mechanism of Depersonalization,' Int. Zeitschr. fuer Psychoan., 1935), the deduction reads something like this: In listening to a joke, the child in the listener plays the voyeur; via identification with the narrator, voyeurism is transformed into exhibitionism; since this change takes place under pressure of the superego, deception of the latter is a prerequisite. Otherwise, Eidelberg holds that real aggression is displayed in wit, a point which I dispute, the pseudoaggression, covering more deeply repressed psychic masochism, seems to me of prime importance for understanding the psychology of wit."

Later, in a chapter on the Four Pillars of The Sense of Humor, he observes: "There is a good deal of truth in Jakels' thesis, although a series of qualifications are necessary. First: The unconscious ego's attack is not a direct onslaught against the pater familias; it is aimed, rather, at the internal ego ideal, the enshrined intrapsychic images of the giants of the nursery, plus the child's own narcissism. Thus the attack is directed against the Daimonion, the antilibidinous section of the superego, which typically misuses the ego ideal for its torture purposes. That correction became necessary after Jakels and I published our theory on the development and structure of the superego in the already-mentioned 'Transference and Love'."

In all, there are 13 chapters, an extensive series of footnotes and a good index. A metaphysician has been defined as a man who goes into a dark cellar at midnight, without a light, looking for a black cat that is not there. If we regard a sense of humor as a cat, reasonably black and with nine lives, we still doubt if it, he or she, could be detected by the laborious technique used by the author. However, the reviewer is not a psychoanalyst. There are a few tales in the book which lighten the otherwise heavy fare: "A woman consults an analyst. She explains tearfully, 'My family thinks I'm crazy. And why: because I like pancakes. Tell me, what's wrong with liking pancakes?' The analyst reassures her: 'Of course there's nothing wrong with liking pancakes. I like them myself.' 'You do,' cries the delighted patient. 'I'll give you some of mine—I have a whole bureau full of them'."

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THE CLINICAL CARE OF THE DIABETIC—James J. Short, M.D., F.A.C.P., Associate Professor of Medicine, School of Medicine, College of Medical Evangelists. San Lucas Press, Los Angeles, 1955. 84 pages, \$3.95.

This book makes no pretense of being "exhaustive or exhausting." It offers nothing new in the care of diabetes, though all the newest theories and opinions are mentioned in passing.

The author's attempt in this book is to be practical and concise. He reports his own opinions and technics (with modifications or apologies here and there) as he has employed them in the successful care of many, many diabetic patients in the past 30 or more years.

Any attempt to make a simple, concise statement about an inherently complicated and incompletely understood disorder like diabetes is a bold, if welcome, effort. Such an effort is easier to criticize than to laud. There are, for instance, several references to a time-honored, and well worn out, theory that if the physician exercises sufficient caution in the care of diabetes he may expect the pancreas, sometimes, to recover. On the laudable side of the ledger is occasional reference to the fact that a diabetic patient is a person, not just a pile of chemicals. Some adjustment of chemical precision, it is advised, is necessary in the case of individuals who, by constitution, can not accept or understand the refinements of ideal discipline.

Compliance with the author's suggestions will provide adequate care for any diabetic patient. Any doctor who has been confused by the welter of contradictory opinions on the subject of diabetes and is looking for something to tie to would do well to anchor here.

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VIRUS DISEASES AND THE CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM—A Survey—Ernest Lyon, M.D., Grune & Stratton, New York, 1956. 215 pages, \$5.75.

This monograph is an excellent compilation of existing knowledge on virus diseases and the cardiovascular system. An analysis of all types of viruses, their general properties, and the types of cardiac abnormalities which occur as a result of infection with them, is very comprehensively discussed. There is a pertinent bibliography following the discussions of each virus and the author has managed to compress a great deal of information in a most compact and readable manner. Many of the references are within the past two years and the work is up-to-date.

This book covers an aspect of cardiovascular disease not otherwise available and I believe it will prove of great interest to all physicians interested in internal medicine, as well as to pediatricians, microbiologists and cardiologists. It is, therefore, strongly recommended.